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Deniz Kandiyoti

POST-COLONIALISM COMPARED: POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

The term "post-colonial" is a relative newcomer to the jargon of Western social science. Although discussions about the effects of colonial and imperialist domination are by no means new, the various meanings attached to the prefix "post-" and different understandings of what characterizes the post-colonial continue to make this term a controversial one. Among the criticisms leveled against it, reviewed comprehensively by Hall (1996), are the dangers of careless homogenizing of experiences as disparate as those of white settler colonies, such as Australia and Canada; of the Latin American continent, whose independence battles were fought in the 19th century; and countries such as India, Nigeria, or Algeria that emerged from very different colonial encounters in the post-World War II era. He suggests, nevertheless, that "What the concept *may* help us to do is to describe or characterise the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence and post-decolonisation moment" (Hall 1996, 246). Rattansi (1997) proposes a distinction between "post-coloniality" to designate a set of historical epochs and "post-colonialism" or "post-colonialist studies" to refer to a particular form of intellectual inquiry that has as its central defining theme the mutually constitutive role played by colonizer and colonized in shaping the identities of both the dominant power and those at the receiving end of imperial and colonial projects. Within the field of post-colonial studies itself, Moore-Gilbert (1997) points to the divide between "post-colonial criticism," which has much earlier antecedents in the writings of those involved in anti-colonial struggles, and "post-colonial theory," which distinguishes itself from the former by the incoporation of methodological paradigms derived from contemporary European cultural theories into discussions of colonial systems of representation and cultural production. Whatever the various interpretations of the term or the various temporalities associated with it might be, Hall claims that the post-colonial "marks a critical interruption into that grand whole historiographical narrative which, in liberal historiography and Weberian historical sociology, as much as in the dominant traditions of Western Marxism, gave this global dimension a subordinate presence in

Deniz Kandiyoti is Associate Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom; e-mail: dk1@soas.ac.uk.

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a story that could essentially be told from its European parameters" (Hall 1996, 250). In what follows, I will attempt a brief discussion of some of the circumstances leading to the emergence of this concept and interrogate the extent to which it lends itself to a meaningful comparison of the modern trajectories of societies in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The early masters of European social science—Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber—who were primarily interested in theorizing transitions to industrial capitalism, had little to say about the nature of colonial encounters and the social structures of non-Western societies. Theirs was, indeed, a story that was told primarily "from within its European parameters." It was the formal dissolution of European colonial empires after World War II and the "national development" agenda of newly independent states that prompted the appearance of a new discourse about the modern trajectories of non-Western societies—that of *development*. Cowen and Shenton (1995) make a convincing case for the 19th-century origins of development by arguing that it was in Europe that development was first meant to create order out of the profound social dislocations created by rapid urbanization, poverty, and unemployment. The early proponents of the development doctrine—the Saint Simonians, Auguste Comte, Friedrich List, and John Stuart Mill—did not simply prefigure more contemporary debates but were themselves implicated in the developmental practice of their time. Nevertheless, the period of development "is now routinely assumed to be the span of imperial and post-colonial history since 1945" (Cowen and Shenton 1995, 29), a periodization that neatly coincides with the most commonly accepted temporal framework of post-colonial scholarship. And, indeed, when the term "post-coloniality" first appeared in the jargon of political theory, it was exclusively associated with the predicament of nations that had thrown off the yoke of European imperial domination after World War II.

In the aftermath of World War II, faith in the efficacy of purposive human intervention in achieving the goals of development was at its height. Practical concerns about promoting rapid economic growth, the fact that the "new nations" became a prime stake in the Cold War, and the establishment of the Bretton Woods financial and trading regimes were, according to Leys (1996) the taken-for-granted backdrop for early development writing in the 1950s. However, disillusionment with the record of early economic-planning efforts, despite formal political independence, soon gave way to a search for "obstacles" to development in the social and political structures of former colonies now relabeled "underdeveloped" countries. Modernization theory became the broad rubric under which "failures" of development were addressed, development itself being defined as a process of transition from "traditional" to "modern" societies. The persistence of tradition and the imperfect transformation of pre-capitalist social structures were held primarily responsible for blockages in the transition process, a tendency that, as we shall see, was also strongly present in Soviet ethnographic writing. One of the distinguishing features of this approach was a stress on the endogenous nature of underdevelopment. The effects of colonization were generally underplayed, and relations with former metropolitan centers were presented as essentially benign. Modernization was about embarking on the path already traversed by Western capitalist societies, which were assumed to represent the end point of this process.

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The earliest critique of this approach emanated from Latin America, a continent that, although it had enjoyed the longest period of formal independence from direct colonial rule, had yet to reap the economic benefits presumed to flow from it. The late 1960s and '70s were dominated by dependency theory, popularized by Andre Gunder Frank, which turned modernization theory on its head by inverting its central assumptions. Underdevelopment was explained as the result of the exploitation of Third World peripheries by metropolitan centers, and the experience of colonial exploitation was privileged to such an extent that the specific histories of the countries concerned often became blurred through their amalgamation into the concepts of "satellite" or "periphery." This had the unintended consequence of reproducing the a-historicism of the category of "tradition" employed by modernization theorists via the spatial metaphors of center and periphery. However, dependency and world-system theories did stimulate a process of sustained reflection on the relationships between the global spread of capitalism and forms of imperialist domination and were subjected to many revisions and elaborations in different regional contexts.

By the 1980s, the international context that underwrote these earlier approaches to development was substantially transformed. The end of the Cold War in the 1990s signaled a final break with the post-war configuration of superpower rivalry in the Third World. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the effects of these changes on social theory per se. It should suffice to note that post-colonial studies flourished in the midst of a "crisis of representation" that also coincided with the erosion of the leading paradigms of development. Indeed, despite their apparent divergences, these paradigms rested on certain shared assumptions: a faith in the efficacy of scientific rationality, a particular conception of progress, a vision of emancipation based on the liberal concept of the autonomous individual—in short, the shared legacy of Enlightenment ideas. It is this very set of shared assumptions that became the target of attack by post-structuralist and post-modernist critics. Central to this attack was the notion that the universalist claims of grand narratives of emancipation (in both their Marxist and bourgeois-liberal variants) foundered on the exclusion from subjecthood of the non-Western, the non-white, and women. Critics of modernity treated it as a powerful discursive construct whose dark underside became manifest in the practices of racism, colonialism, and sexism and argued that the very notion of the Western Self was predicated on the construction of the non-Western Other. As Rattansi puts it, "The idea of the 'West' as white, Christian, rational, civilized, modern, sexually disciplined and indeed *masculine* was put into place in a protracted process in which the colonized Others were defined in opposition to these virtues" (Rattansi 1977, 482). Foucault's writings on the nature of modern orders and on the mechanisms of surveillance and disciplinary power deployed through modern institutions had a defining influence on post-colonial scholarship, despite the fact that they took France and northern Europe as their primary object. This influence was largely mediated through Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which can be considered one of the founding texts of post-colonial studies (in its post-colonial–theory variant). Said combined the central insights of Foucault about the mutual relations of knowledge and power with Gramsci's notion of hegemony to argue that Western power enabled the production of knowledge about other cultures that, in turn, became an instrument of further Western domination. This domination was not based merely on processes of surplus extraction

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but on a process of construction of the Orient that acted as a grid for filtering ideas and practices that ultimately establish the positional superiority of the West. This approach was not without its critics (Ahmad 1992; Clifford 1980) but acted to stimulate further analyses of the process of production of knowledge about non-Western societies in a wide range of historical and geographical contexts. The work that followed went beyond colonial encounters per se, critically evaluating the projects of modernization made evident in post-colonial nationalisms (Chatterjee 1986, 1993). One of the major contributions of post-colonial scholarship was to draw attention to the formative influence of colonial encounters in the shaping of national cultures and nation-states. This influence was acknowledged by Anderson (1991), who revised his initial assumption that official nationalism in the colonized world was modeled on that of the dynastic states of 19th-century Europe and proposed instead that its immediate genealogy should be traced to the imaginings of the colonial state. The later "developmentalisms" of post-independence states were also subjected to new scrutiny in the light of a critical rethinking of modernity.

These endeavors helped to define the contours of post-colonial scholarship, a field whose concerns may be articulated somewhat differently in different disciplines. Hall (1996) introduces a note of caution in his otherwise complimentary assessment of post-colonial studies; he notes a growing divergence between two halves of the current debate on late modernity—the post-colonial and the analysis of new developments in global capitalism—a divergence that he feels is detrimental to both sides of the debate. He attributes this state of affairs to the fact that post-colonial scholarship has been developed most fully by scholars in the humanities who were unwilling or unable to address contemporary transformations in global capitalism and to the move away from reductive forms of economism, which has, in some instances, gone as far as dispensing with political economy altogether. This observation may hold one of the keys to extending the reach of post-colonial analysis, especially if one intends to put it to comparative uses. Indeed, any fruitful comparison of the post-colonial trajectories of Middle Eastern and Central Asian societies must necessarily take into account not only the historical specificities of their colonial encounters but also the very different modalities and temporalities of their insertion into world capitalist markets. This would amount to a rather ambitious comparative agenda that we have barely begun to explore.

The analysis that follows does not purport to go beyond providing some tentative suggestions concerning the potentialities and limitations of post-coloniality as a concept in the context of the Middle East and Central Asia. Furthermore, it does not pretend to provide a balanced or exhaustive presentation of post-colonial scholarship in the two regions but to draw some parallels between discourses on modernization emanating from very different scholarly traditions. Students of the Middle East have had a much longer engagement with theorizing the nature of colonial encounters with the West and have produced classic works on this subject, some engaging in radical critiques of their disciplines (cf. Asad 1973). These works, which map out a rich and varied terrain, also consider the implications of post-colonial modernities and nationalisms for family and gender relations (Abu-Lughod 1998; Chatterjee 1990; Kandiyoti 1993). In contrast, studies of Central Asia, emerging from the dual legacies of Western Sovietology and Soviet ethnography and historiography, have a narrower

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repertoire of analytic and substantive concerns and have only recently begun the work of reassessing the encounters with imperial Russia and the successor Soviet state. The article is therefore biased toward achieving a better understanding of these emerging tendencies. The first part provides a brief sketch of the development of post-Orientalist scholarship in the Middle East; the second part analyzes contrasting approaches to the modernization of Central Asia; and the conclusion offers a critical commentary on the usefulness of their comparison under the rubric of post-coloniality.

FROM *THE PASSING OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY* TO *COLONISING EGYPT*

If one had to pick out two texts that best exemplify the path traversed by Middle East studies between the heyday of early modernization theory and the turn to post-colonial scholarship, the choice could easily go to Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) and Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* (1988). The thirty-year span that separates their publication witnessed, among other things, the rise and fall of state-led developmentalism and a general disenchantment with the legacies of post-independence states. The concept of modernity, that was so central to analyses of social change in the region, became a contentious category, appropriated by some, vilified by others, and subjected to critical scrutiny in post-Orientalist scholarship.

The Passing of Traditional Society is mainly of historical interest because it is arguably the last text that could still refer on its back cover to the ancient cultures of the Middle East as having remained "substantially unchanged for twenty centuries." It presents modernization as both desirable and imperative, although the road to modernity may be beset by problems and difficulties. The Preface sets the tone by pointing out that modernization, initially conceptualized as a technical "fix" generating a self-sustaining cycle of growth, may not be quite so easy to achieve. "The trouble with this cogent technical solution," the authors states, "is people. They don't do what, on any rational course of behavior, they should do" (Lerner 1958, vii). Modernity therefore requires above all a characterological transformation that has already taken place in the West but must inevitably become generalized to the rest of the modernizing world. Lerner leaves the reader in no doubt that the process he claims to be witnessing in the Middle East is a recapitulation of a previous historical transition achieved over a much longer time span in the West. There is, furthermore, a single road to modernity: "[u]nderlying the various ideological forms which modernization took in Europe, America, Russia, there have been certain behavioral and institutional compulsions common to all" (Lerner 1958, 47). Evaluating the advances of any new nation, as Hermassi (1972) has noted, then became a matter of assessing the degree to which they approximate the characteristics of industrial societies, which is precisely what Lerner attempted to do by classifying countries and individuals as "Traditional," "Transitional," or "Modern" by means of quantitative indicators.

Going beyond the more transparently ethnocentric and ideological prescriptions of this text, one is struck by a certain lack of fit between the schematic typologies set up in the theoretical section and the chapters on individual countries where the intrusions of history act to disrupt the neat categories on offer. The chapter on Egypt is particularly revealing in this respect. After arguing for a version of Tradition as a self-

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enclosed, immobile, and unchanging universe, Lerner has to concede that this may not apply to Egyptian farmers who have long been incorporated into world markets through cotton cash-cropping. "Their interest in what happens to cotton markets thus pierces the shell of Traditional isolationism and extends their horizons beyond the village limits" (Lerner 1958, 227). Likewise, elite and non-elite responses to British colonial domination and the emergence of a potentially militant working class are all acknowledged before being tidied back into the traditional, transitional, modern typology. The difficulties of sustaining the myth of Eastern immobility (or Tradition) are everywhere apparent but not allowed to get in the way of the ideological message of the modernization school. Lest we imagine this to have been a temporary aberration, we may turn to Gilsenan's (1990) incisive commentary on the staying power of the trope of the Middle East as a timeless "village" society threatened by looming forces of social change at a time that Orientalism was giving way to "Middle East studies" as an area of expertise and anthropologists were trying to find their own niche within it.

By the 1970s, the dependency and world-systems approaches had started making substantial inroads into studies of the Middle East. The first stirrings of post-Orientalist scholarship were predominantly informed by political economy, a fact that may easily be overlooked in reference to Said's *Orientalism* as a pathbreaking text. Economic historians of the Middle East engaged with these post-Marxist schools, and some of the most stimulating work emerged through a creative tension between the central assumptions of dependency and world-systems approaches and the discussion of their applicability to Middle Eastern contexts. Roger Owen's *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800–1914* (1981) made reference to ongoing debates about Third World economic transformation while the text itself strongly militated against any facile importation of center–periphery models of surplus extraction and the role of local states. Numerous works by 19th-century economic historians on Ottoman Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran started filling out an increasingly sophisticated picture of both the entanglements of the region in an expansive European capitalism and the particularities of local economies and polities. In their introduction to an influential volume, Asad and Owen (1983) distanced themselves from approaches to Middle Eastern development that consisted "mainly of the somewhat simplistic employment of concepts taken from the history of modern Europe or from the study of other parts of the non-European world" (Asad and Owen 1983, 1). The former could refer equally well to modernization theory as to orthodox Marxist approaches to transitions from feudalism, while the latter might apply to cruder versions of dependency theory. Significantly, this introduction ended with a recommendation for more work on culture and cultural processes, an inducement to bridge the gap between the central concerns of political economists and what would become the areas of predilection of post-colonial scholarship.

Asad's later work develops new and more searching perspectives on the question of the impact of the West on cultural production in non-Western societies. Taking issue with anthropologists who fashionably insist on the thesis of agency and creativity in the non-European world in the name of cultural autonomy, he suggests instead that an anthropological understanding of Western thought and history is crucial, because "its conceptual geology has profound implications for the ways in which non-Western traditions are now able to grow and change" (Asad 1993, 1). He therefore proposes a

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historical anthropology that takes the cultural hegemony of the West as its object of inquiry. Having done that, however, he also refuses to reduce other traditions to epiphenomena of the expanding influence of the post-Enlightenment West. More specifically, he argues that orthodox Islamic criticism must be understood with reference to its own discursive logic, emanting from a different tradition than that of the post-Enlightenment West. He sets himself the difficult task of theorizing both the effectivity of the West and the simultaneous existence of traditions of reason and political debate emanating from "non-Englightenment societies" (Asad 1993, 207).

It is Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* that gives the task of "anthropologizing" the nature of modern orders one of its more comprehensive expressions. This is partly achieved through the ingenious device of relativizing and "provincializing" 19th-century Europe itself and analyzing it as a local curiosity—much as the Orientalists had done with the cultures of the Middle East. This approach is greatly indebted to the earlier insights of both Foucault and Said and extends their mode of enquiry to an analysis of the colonial shaping of institutional arenas such as modern schooling, the creation of a modern army, the regimentation of rural Egypt, urban planning, and public health. The author shows how modern practices of ordering, disciplining, and enframing create a world seemingly divided into two: "into self and other, into things themselves and their plan, into bodies and minds, into the material and the conceptual" (Mitchell 1988, 171).

In order to drive home the specificity of this modernist metaphysics, on which he elaborates with reference to the works of Heidegger and Derrida, Mitchell resorts to comparisons with settings and periods in which other principles might have been at work—such as pre-modern Middle Eastern towns or Kabyle villages. The author engages in this exercise with some trepidation, aware of the possible perils of setting up some reified opposite to modernity in the form of self-contained, pre-capitalist totality that satisfies our yearning for some lost age of innocence. In fact, he states quite clearly that any impression of other kinds of orders as total and self-contained opposites to the modern is totally unintended. This reticence is well placed, given the ease with which the demonology of modernization, vilifying tradition as a source of stasis and oppression, may be turned on its head, with modernity now being cast as both an alien and a repressive order that relegates culturally more authentic forms to the margins. This may, in turn, stimulate a rhetoric of return to authentic culture based on further myth-making and reification, a move that would invalidate the anti-foundational thrust of *Colonising Egypt*. This, indeed, is what Gilsenan (1990, 238) suggests may have happened in the rejection of Orientalism by some Arab intellectuals in favor of indigenous models of thought and representation frequently articulated in strongly cultural nationalist terms. That would totally defeat the purposes of post-colonial scholarship that aims, in principle, to dismantle binaries such as East–West and indigenous–foreign and analyze instead the processes of cultural hybridization that characterize post-colonial modernities.

There has, however, been a conjuncture in Middle East studies that has attenuated the potential for such exploration and prompted a process of renewed reflection on the nature of Muslim polities that sometimes paved the way to new forms of essentialism. The developmental failures and legitimacy crises of post-colonial regimes throughout the region, aggravated by their inability to push through policies of eco-

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nomic adjustment and the simultaneous rise to prominence of Islamist movements and parties, acted to fuel renewed debates on the nature of the state and civil society in Muslim societies. Some, such as Zubaida (1988), argued convincingly that Islamist projects are articulated within the political field of the modern nation-state, while others, such as Badie (1986), argued for the specificity of the Muslim state. A wave of "neo-Orientalist" writing argued the incompatibility of Islam with modern forms of governance (Sadowski 1997), while others insisted on situating political Islam in the context of international economic and political influences on the region (Beinin and Stork 1997). As noted by Hall for post-colonial studies more generally, culturalist discussions on the nature of modern and post-modern identities and the roles of Islam and the West and discussions grounded in international relations and political economy started showing signs of drifting apart. The challenge for post-colonial studies in the Middle East will be to achieve a better integration of these currently fragmented concerns.

SOVIET MODERNIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: A PARADOX

In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993, xxx) remarks that the British, French, and American imperial experience "has a unique coherence and a special cultural centrality." This implies that other imperial formations such as the Russian, the Ottoman, and the Austro-Hungarian (each with their own troubled histories of modernization and ultimate decline) may represent distinct patterns that are not comparable to the history of Euro-Atlantic expansionism. There is, therefore, a sense in which the field of post-colonial studies is itself Eurocentric to the extent that it privileges a particular type of colonial encounter—namely, that between the capitalist metropolises of the West and their colonies or semi-colonies in the rest of the world. Recent volumes such as *Russia's Orient* (Brower 1997) may help to broaden our perspectives by drawing attention to both the similarities and the differences between the Russian policies and practices of imperial rule and those of other Western empires.

The case of Central Asia is particularly productive for the purposes of comparison because it was both colonized through Russian imperial expansion in the late 19th century and subjected to new forms of control by a non-capitalist metropolis after the victory of the Bolsheviks. What adds to the intricacy of this case is the fact that the Bolsheviks evolved their own critique of colonialism as part and parcel of their ideological onslaught on the Russian ancien regime and claimed to have made a decisive break from their imperial past while retaining political-administrative control over the former subject territories. The continuities and discontinuities between the colonial and Soviet periods is a subject that is likely to continue to occupy historians, not least because these issues, which were mainly debated within a perspective that reflected official Soviet ideology, are currently being subjected to extensive revisions. The Soviet version emphasized the voluntary nature of the participation of Central Asian republics in the communist project and cast local elites as feudal oppressors (Pierce 1960). However, as Brower (1997) notes in his examination of Russian colonial policy in Turkistan, there were numerous areas of continuity and, indeed, of further refinement of colonial policies after the Bolshevik revolution. He suggests, for instance,

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that "the ethnographic project thrived at the hands of Soviet officials who proved far more zealous practitioners than Kaufman in claiming to 'know' ethnic groups and in drawing ethno-national boundaries" (Brower 1997, 133). Currently, new analyses of the emergence and role of national intelligentsias prior to the victory of the Bolsheviks, and in particular that of Jadidist reformers, are challenging the Soviet historiography of the region. Nationalist historians are going further by recuperating former villains, such as the *basmachi* rebels who fought against the Bolsheviks, as heroes of national resistance and reinstating figures from the past as the true heirs of national culture. In this respect, Burbank (1993) cautions us against the debilitating effects of the "teleological read-back of 1917" on historical research and argues for a rejection of the artificial categories of both the Soviet canon and the various national canons.

There is, nevertheless, little doubt that Soviet historiography has exerted a powerful influence on writing on the region. Stahl (1950), for instance, argued that in contrast to the Russian imperial period, in which the peoples of Central Asia where little interfered with in terms of their customary lifeways (a questionable proposition in itself), the communist regime embarked on an aggressive course of rapid modernization. "The arduous task of turning these primitive tribal peoples into active communist citizens, of transforming their ways of life by the introduction of collectivized, mechanized agricultural methods and of industrialization, requiring not only the import of plant but also of industrial workers, was pressed through by methods which took no cognizance of the national peculiarities of the peoples concerned and often at a pace more suited to the requirements of military than economic development" (Stahl 1950, 75). This construction of a stagnant, backward, and immobile traditional society, forced to "awaken," was so well-established in the annals of Soviet writing that it was, as in this case, rather uncritically accepted by some Western scholars, as well.

Yet it is difficult for any Western reader not to be struck by the coexistence of two totally contradictory discourses on Soviet modernization in Central Asia. On the one hand, there are numerous ideologically inspired celebrations of the achievements of Soviet-style modernization, pointing, among other things, to the emancipation of women, universal literacy, and the triumph of Soviet forms of expression over "traditional" cultures. English-language reviews of Soviet sources, such as Silver (1992) and Jones and Grupp (1992), reveal themes that are thoroughly familiar to any reader well versed in the Parsonian variants of Western modernization theory. In addition to those, transcending national particularisms through assimilation into "Soviet" culture is presented as the highest point of modernization, and indicators of success are elaborated on in numerous writings on so-called cultural convergence (see, for instance, Dunn and Dunn 1973). On the other hand, many commentators, depending on their inclinations, either lamented or celebrated the durability of local (Muslim) cultures, the relative lack of penetrative capacity of the Soviet state, and the strength of local social patterns.[1] How can we explain such apparent contradictions? And what underlying processes do they reveal or conceal?

There were clearly striking parallels between Western modernization theory and Soviet writing on social transformation. These reached a climax at the point at which so-called convergence theory predicted similar outcomes of modernity for high industrialism, whether this was achieved through a capitalist or a socialist route.

Jones and Grupp (1992, 487), who reviewed the results of Soviet social surveys in

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an attempt to assess the impact of modernizing institutions such as school, factory, and urban living on the "late modernizing minorities of the USSR," rehearsed familiar themes and concluded, "Exposure to mass communications, education, urban life and the modern bureaucrary in the USSR has produced dramatic changes in family values and gender roles—changes that parallel those found in non-socialist settings." The accepted wisdom was therefore that Soviet institutions were modernizing the otherwise stagnant traditional Central Asian cultures. Interestingly, Pierce offered a similar assessment of the Russian colonial heritage as a modernizing influence:

> [F]or this was not merely a Russian affair but a facet of the entire Western colonial tradition, traceable to the days when Rome brought water, roads and bridges and her pax to the ends of the known world, including some of the very lands which in modern times built their own empires around the globe [Pierce 1960, 302].

There was, therefore, a sense that as far as Central Asia was concerned, both the Russian colonial period and the Soviet regime that followed could be construed as part of the inevitable dominion of the West over the East. This is all the more ironic if we note, as Burbank (1993) does, that unfavorable comparisons with the West, of the "catching up" variety, were a central part of Russian culture, a phenomenon that is thoroughly familiar to students of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, this assumed, albeit ambiguous, superiority was couched in the Soviet period in a new language of tutelage, invoking "fraternal help" to nations that were less able to help themselves.

There was, for a long time, surprisingly little discussion of the possible effects of the Moscow-led command economy on the Asian peripheries of the Soviet Union. The close analytic connection between capitalist expansion and imperialism by and large retarded a parallel discussion of the role of the Soviet state. However, a style of enquiry reminiscent of dependency theory did develop, as did critical perspectives on the nature of the encounter with the Soviet state (e.g., Gleason 1991). One of the earliest discussions, provided by Nove and Newton (1967), drew attention to the difficulties of conceptualizing Soviet rule as a clear-cut case of colonial domination because it exhibited many contradictory features: a diversion of capital to less developed areas that are difficult to justify on strict economic grounds, on the one hand, and the centralizing practices of the Soviet state and dominance of the Russians, on the other. The clearest case for treating the role of the former Soviet state as an extension of Russian colonization was made by Shahrani (1993). He argued that Soviet policy in Central Asia should be evaluated as a colonial project geared to the center's aims of economic and ideological control. On the economic front, the Muslim periphery was utilized as a source of primary commodities—petroleum in the case of Azerbaijan and cotton in Central Asia. On the ideological front, the modernization of Central Asian populations mandated nothing short of a systematic onslaught on existing patterns of social institutions, identities, and loyalties. This onslaught took the form of territorial fragmentation and the constitution of artificial ethno-national entities, the severance of links with both the Turko-Persian heritage and the wider Muslim world through the adoption of differently modified forms of the Cyrillic alphabet, and the systematic destruction of Muslim institutions. This approach, which evaluates Soviet designs as having achieved their main objectives, may be contrasted with that of Khazanov (1995), who presents the key problem of the region as that of underdevelop-

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ment. This condition was induced by the inter-regional division of labor imposed by Moscow, which worked to the detriment of the region by defining it as a supplier of raw materials within a framework of unequal exchange. Lack of industrialization and the immobility of the local populations were exacerbated by the ethnic stratification resulting from the settlement of non-ethnic populations in the Central Asian republics. He concludes bleakly that in the post-Soviet period the region appears as "another Third World region with unsolved structural problems and minimal potential for rapid economic and sociopolitical development" (Khazanov 1995, 155).

Against this background, it may appear somewhat surprising to learn from some Russian commentators that the Soviet system made limited inroads into the societies in question. Some, such as Malashenko (1993) go as far as arguing that if we are talking about culture loss, then the turmoil created by the Soviet regime has been far greater for the Russians, because the institutions of Russian Orthodoxy were dismantled more thoroughly than those of Islam, which, for a variety of reasons, received more support at the official level.[2] Indeed, one may easily be left with the impression that the formerly "backward" peoples of Central Asia are being recast by Russian commentators as sturdy local cultures that have managed to retain and reproduce some immutable cultural essence. These notions of unbroken, trans-historical ethno-cultural essence may also be put in the service of the articulation of post-Soviet nationalisms, as indeed they currently are, in the search for lineages to independent nation-states. However, such understandings are not new, and their antecedents in Soviet policies and scholarship—particularly, in Soviet ethnography—must be explored.

SOVIET ETHNOGRAPHY AND NATIONALITY POLICY

The local cultures the Russians encountered in Central Asia in the late 19th century could easily be construed by the colonists as archetypes of "tradition": patrilineal tribal formations among the nomads, sometimes with tribal aristocracies; sedentary populations subject to the control of the patriarchal family; local autocrats and the strictures of Islam; and all of this overlaid by the "Asian immobility" assumed by Soviet commentators to be associated with the so-called Asiatic mode of production. The modernizing encounter was not between two civilizations—that of the West and the "Orient," however defined—but between a declining colonial power, uncertain about its own place of insertion into the historic West, and subject to much soul-searching about its own backwardness, and diverse indigenous formations, ranging from the sedentary populations of the great Islamic centers and urban settlements of the Maverannahr, literate and Islamized, to the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the steppes, whose conversion to Islam came later and remained for a long time a thin veneer on their ancient animistic beliefs and cosmologies. The task that fell to Soviet ethnographers of understanding, classifying, and ultimately playing a role in transforming these entities presents unique features that cannot be assimilated to the role of anthropologists in the colonial encounters of the West, despite a similar interest in administering ethnically and religiously disparate subject populations. One noteworthy feature of this case is the particular role attributed to the category of "ethnos" in Soviet ethnography, the antecedents of which can be traced to Russian imperial modes of knowledge production from the 18th century onward (Slezkine 1997).

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Shanin (1989) offers an incisive account of the interpenetration between Soviet nationality policy and the notions of ethnos and ethnogenesis that dominated Soviet ethnography. He draws our attention to the fact that Soviet perceptions of ethnicity and their expression in the social sciences differed significantly from those of their Western counterparts. The very fact that the term *natsional'nost* (which he translates as ethnicity, with many reservations) has no exact equivalent is telling in this respect.[3] Differing radically from Western approaches that adopt a relativistic position, by the 1960s Soviet ethnologists saw ethnicity "as a culturally self-reproducing set of behavioural patterns linked to collective self-identity, which continues through different modes of production and is significantly autonomous from the forces and relations of production. A new cross-modes concept of *ethnos* was declared the *differencia specificia* of ethnology as a discipline" (Shanin 1989, 413).

Inevitably, various adjustments were necessary to make this notion of ethnos fit in with the orthodox evolutionist sequence of socio-economic formations postulated by Stalin. Skalnik (1990) argues that the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, under the leadership of Bromley, squared this circle by invoking the concept of "ethno-social organism" (ESO). This subsumed both *etnikos*—namely, the stable common features of language, culture, psychology, and self-consciousness characterizing a collectivity—and the types of broader societies (primitive, feudal, capitalist) of which they formed a part. "It is precisely," Bromley (1974, 69) suggests, "this relative conservatism and certain independence of ethnic qualities that conditions the possibility to preserve basically the same 'ethnikos' over a period of several socio-economic structures." This made it possible to posit ethnos as something consistent, enduring, and objectively existing, thus creating a space for traditional ethnographic research while at the same time paying lip service to the Marxist–Leninist sequencing of socio-economic formations. This produced a reification of cultural diversity on the basis of arid definitional speculations and an aversion to any real discussion of the actual problems of inter-ethnic relations. Skalnik (1990) is particularly critical about the fact that this theory served as window-dressing for Soviet ethnic pluralism and as evidence of the respect of the party for the language, culture, and mentality of each ethnic group in the USSR. He suggests, furthermore, that ethnographers provided the ancient policy of Russification, inherited from the czarist regime, with the new wrapping of "progressive" amalgamation into the first international (inter-ethnic) formation based on socialism. Thus, the highest point of modernization was represented by the merging (*slianiie*) of ethnic particularisms into a new superordinate entity—the Soviet people (*sovetskii narod*), whose lingua franca happened to be Russian, the language of inter-ethnic communication, universalism, and civilization.

There is overwhelming evidence that Soviet representations of "ethnic" cultures, however arbitrary, may have been powerfully internalized by those Soviet peoples who may have had a different vocabulary to articulate their sense of identity and a less salient sense of themselves in ethnic terms. Roy (1991–92), for instance, suggests that what took place under the Soviet system was the reification of a play of identities that were much more open, dynamic, and relational than either theories of ethnos or state policies could adequately reflect. One of the most frequently cited paradoxes of Soviet nationality policy is that, although it officially espoused the goal of merging nationalities and transcending ethnic particularisms, it institutionalized, codified, and

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established them as a primary basis for solidarity. Numerous authors appear to be in agreement about the Soviet Union's role in the process of nation-building among the non-Russian peoples (Bremmer and Taras 1993; Smith 1993; Suny 1993; Zaslavsky 1993). In Central Asia, the drawing up of new territorial boundaries in the region formerly known as Turkistan achieved lasting importance as the context for the development of institutions laying the groundwork for nationhood: the cultivation of local national intelligentsias and cadres, the codification and elaboration of national languages, cultural and scientific establishments, and an elaborate system of schooling in non-Russian languages, to name but a few. Roeder (1991, 205) goes as far as to suggest that for many Soviet citizens, "the first sustained contact with the great traditions of their own ethnic group was in the form of this national-Soviet hybrid." Slezkine, who traces the ups and downs of Soviet nationality policy through its initial period of "pursuit of countless rootless nationalities" to the period of high Stalinism, which shifted the emphasis to the consolidation of fewer full-fledged "titular nationalities," demonstrates convincingly that the notion of ethnicity as "universal, irreducible and inherently moral" (1996, 227) became firmly entrenched in the Soviet system. Anderson's (1991) suggestions concerning the colonial origins of post-colonial nation-states seem amply borne out in these examples. However, as Brubaker (1994) points out, these nation-building processes bear the hallmark of a system of institutional mismatch between ethnocultural nation and citizenry, whereby nationhood is not related to legal citizenship of a state but is the prerogative of sub-state ethno-territorial groups. It is not citizenship but *natsional'nost*, an ascriptive legal category, that determines one's life chances—positively if one is a member of one of the "titular" nationalities, and negatively if one happens to be a member of a "minority" nationality. Thus, Gleason (1993) suggests that ethnic belonging is not merely about preferences in lifestyles and customs; it is very much related to something as crucial as expectations about the future. Roeder (1991) relates the recent aggravation of this state of affairs to a redistributive crisis. The ruling cadres of titular republics put in place through the policy of indigenization (*korenisatsiia*) were able to create their own power bases and secure avenues of mobility, given the measures of positive discrimination in their favor. The Soviet Union-wide economic slowdown meant that titular nationalities could shift the brunt of the drying up of central resources to their minority populations by discriminating against them. He shows cogently how specific patterns of Soviet elite co-optation and distribution of rewards led to new patterns of ethnopolitics. A clear conclusion emerging from these observations is that the institutions put in place played a crucial role in defining the parameters of social life, a conclusion that is in keeping with some of the central insights of post-colonial scholarship.

"TRADITIONALISM" OR "HYBRIDITY"?

We can now return to the apparent paradox signaled in the section on Soviet modernization—that what appeared to some as rapid modernization and radical change was interpreted by others as cultural stasis and immobility. The most striking feature of these contradictory interpretations is an apparent inability to recognize the mutual imbrication of Soviet institutions with local cultural forms and to identify processes commonly referred to as "hybridization" in post-colonial scholarship. Paradoxically,

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to the extent that until relatively recently the countries of the Soviet Union have been somewhat more immune to the globalizing effects of world capitalism, center–periphery models of domination on which theories of hybridity have implicitly relied may have even greater purchase there than in the capitalist West. This systematic oversight is in part due to the fact that Soviet ethnographers had a particular attachment to the concept of "traditionalism" as a means of explaining social forms and outcomes that did not conform to their prescriptions of modernity. By invoking this concept, it became possible to talk about cultural complexes that could actively resist or block attempts at social transformation and result in stasis and continuity, thus constituting actual targets for propaganda and social-engineering work.

The most forceful case for such continuity, despite decades of Soviet rule in Central Asia, was made by Poliakov (1992). His main contention was that behind the facade of modernization lay the reality of an untransformed traditional society that has both resisted and subverted Soviet attempts to change property relations and the moral and cultural bases of community life. Superficially, one can discern similarities here with the "cultural obstacles to change" literature of early modernization theory, with its stress on endogenous factors that block development. This impression is quite misleading, however, because Poliakov, a convinced materialist, was willing to accord the cultural complex that he describes as "traditionalism" only the status of a superstructural phenomenon that could not survive outside the economic context which lent it life and substance. It is only with reference to this untransformed economic base (rather than to Islam per se) that we can understand a host of empirical phenomena: widespread petty commodity production despite collectivization, sharp age and gender hierarchies in large rural households, the prevalence of arranged marriages and *kalym* (bride price), high fertility, the subordinate status of women, high levels of spending for lifecycle rituals, and the salient role of the *mahalla* (neighborhood) and the mosque as key socializing agencies competing with formal Soviet schooling, to name but a few. Poliakov's approach was quite bold because he put aside the language of "remnants" and "survivals" used by his colleagues when witnessing similar phenomena, choosing instead to present these features as endemic.

Poliakov explained these outcomes as evidence of a failed transformation. He was not able to discern, as Lubin's (1984) study did, some underlying rationales behind indigenous nationalities' livelihood strategies. Lubin suggested that preferences for work outside the socialized sector, in agriculture and the services, were based on solid economic reasons because these offered much better prospects for higher incomes earned as unofficial emoluments for scarce services and commodities or as the result of parallel activities on unofficial markets. Poliakov, who insisted on the "irrational" nature of Central Asian social patterns, opted instead for a materialist–structuralist account. His starting point was that Central Asian societies constituted an instance of the Asiatic mode of production manifesting itself in diverse forms of livelihood, such as subsistence agriculture, irrigated farming, and mobile stock-breeding (Poliakov 1993). This system was characterized by the absence of private property and the limited development of the forces of production. The beginnings of agrarian capitalism stimulated by incorporation into the Russian empire, and the islands of private property to which it gave rise, were swept away by collectivization, which reached Central Asia in the 1930s in the form of "Stalinist communal-serfdom" (Poliakov

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1993, 126). Collectivization restored to its former strength the local community, which had been weakened by colonial rule, and the authoritarian–patriarchal management of the collective-farm system based on patron–client relations between superiors and subordinates could readily be absorbed into customary lifeways. The clear conclusion emerging from his analysis was that the Soviet system in Central Asia, far from effecting a progressive transformation, actually reinforced and gave a longer lease on life to pre-capitalist forms of production and social organization. This is a suggestion that must be taken seriously, despite the fact that Poliakov attributes what he interprets as cultural stasis to the arrested capitalist development of the Central Asian periphery, and the resulting strength of "traditionalism." The possibility that local cultural features and institutions may have articulated with some intrinsic aspects of the command economy and Soviet political-administrative structures to produce diverse new forms was simply not entertained.

Yet evidence abounds pointing to the "colonization" of Soviet institutions by pre-Soviet forms of social organization. Bacon (1966) was one of the first to note a process of overlap between Soviet institutions such as *kolkhoz*es and brigades and tribal formations in Central Asia. Olcott (1987) also showed that, among the Kazakhs, the real structure of local power was controlled by traditional clanic leaders behind a facade of Communist Party organization. Poliakov's own data on collective farms in Tajikistan point to the continuing importance of the extended family, the *avlod* in work organization, and the constitution of work brigades in collective farms. Referring to similiar patrilineal groupings as *elat* among the Khorezm Uzbeks, Snesarev (1974, 229) acknowledges that "[t]he prevalence in our day, although in residual form, of these territorial-kinship groups introduces certain complications in the social life of the kolkhoz." These take the concrete form of refusing to leave inhabited places for new settlements and continuing to maintain the mutual aid and ritual functions of the *elat*, even though its economic role may be marginal. Dragadze's (1988) ethnography of a Georgian village also suggests that, far from modifying and undercutting family solidarities, the Soviet system actually reinforced them as the only refuge from powerlessness and as a source of security in a shortage economy. In the rather different context of Turkmenistan, Bouchet (1991–92, 66) makes the observation that "the kolkhoz does not abolish tribalism, it becomes its context." Whereas originally tribal formations served significant socio-economic roles and worked in pursuit of common economic objectives, under the Soviet system their role may have been reduced to the pure exchange of services and, in cases of asymmetrical exchange, to new forms of clientelism. It is in this sense that it is possible to discern a degree of capture of Soviet institutions and of possibilities of maneuvering within them in the framework of local networks of obligation and clientelism. This point is also clearly illustrated in Humphrey's (1983) ethnography of a Siberian collective farm, which demonstrates that internal contradictions within the command economy result in the local Buryat "gift economy" seeping into its cracks and transforming the nature of both economic transactions and Buryat practices in the process.

Is it then the very adaptation of Soviet institutions to local forms of organization and consciousness that paradoxically accounts for the "sovietization" of the local? Bouchet would seem to concur with this evaluation when he states: "Soviet Turkmens are not merely Turkmens living in the Soviet Union, they integrate deeply the 'soviet'

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dimension to their identity" (1991–92, 66). Bouchet, like Humphrey, comes close to abolishing the distinction between some pristine notion of indigenous culture and the Soviet institutions that are assumed to stand in some relationship of exteriority to them. He invites us to think instead in terms of multiple and overlapping identities that may be shaped and reshaped through diverse historical encounters.

More recent research on patterns of social stratification in the former Soviet Union[4] confirms the co-existence of diverse subcultures that stand in a different relationship to both the immediate Soviet past and the emerging national cultures after independence. These exhibit different degrees of cosmopolitanism or attachment to local values and may express different stakes vis-à-vis the changes currently taking place in post-Soviet societies. Further in-depth analyses will be required to tease out the different strands in the formation of these identities and to evaluate the extent to which they are susceptible to new forms of politicization. Let us note, however, that it is only since the break-up of the Soviet Union that an acknowledgement of hybridity and of more complex definitions of identity appears to have become possible.

CONCLUSION

A parallel reading of sources on colonial encounters and modernization in Middle Eastern and Central Asian societies reveals significant commonalities as well as important differences. Some of the central themes of both the modernization and dependency theories can be found in writings about both regions. At a very broad level of generality, it is also possible to argue that Orientalist constructions of timeless Tradition were evoked, if somewhat differently, in both regional contexts. It would, however, be unnecessarily sterile to pitch comparisons at such a high level of abstraction and merely add the case of Central Asia to a growing body of post-colonial scholarship that concerns itself principally with a critique of Western modernity. That would not only fail to capture the specificities of the Soviet case, with its distinctive approach to the institutionalization of ethnonational difference as the basis for the distribution of social rewards and its consequent implications for post-independence nationalisms; it would also limit more open-ended explorations into the possible meanings of post-coloniality itself. As Moore-Gilbert suggests, "there are many degrees, forms and (characteristically intertwined) histories of colonization and there are going to be many different degrees, forms and histories of postcoloniality as a consequence" (1997, 12).

I started out by suggesting that an understanding of the trajectories of post-colonial states cannot limit itself to an analysis of colonial encounters. It also has to take into account the ongoing influences of global markets and transnational forces. I will conclude by proposing three areas for investigation that would satisfy these criteria and lend themselves particularly well to useful comparisons between the Middle East and Central Asia. The first concerns the natural histories of two leading commodities—cotton and oil—that played and continue to play a central role in the economies of both regions. The contrasting historical and institutional contexts in which these commodities rose to prominence, in fertile valleys with sedentary populations and arid regions dominated by pastoralism, deserve careful investigation, as does their continuing importance in further integration into world markets. The second area has

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to do with patterns of social stratification and elite formation. Although a great deal has been written on the Middle East (and South Asia) about particular forms of internalization of Western models by local elites and on the gulf that often separates nationalist elites and the masses they were meant to lead, such studies have barely begun in Central Asia. Yet the process of Russification, plainly evident in the language and schooling of Soviet elites, can be demonstrated to have gone a great deal deeper and spread farther into the grass-roots than the Westernism of their Middle Eastern counterparts. Indeed, one may go further to suggest that the diffusion of the fruits of Soviet development to the lower strata of society separates Central Asian societies from those of the Middle East.[5] Finally, the very different insertions of Islam into the cultures and polities of the two regions, and its current evolution under the impact of varied national and transnational influences, also constitutes an important focus for comparison. Our discussions of post-colonial nationalisms would remain purely formalistic if they failed to take account of struggles over resources, legitimacy, and meaning.

NOTES

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[1]For instance, Carrere-d'Encausse (1979) suggested that, far from producing "homo Sovieticus," Central Asian societies remained dominated by "homo Islamicus," which would inevitably reveal fault lines in the Soviet system. She contends, furthermore, that Soviet modernization ran into "an almost impenetrable socio-cultural situation" (Carrere-d'Encausse 1979, 249).

[2]This author points to cycles of leniency and repression based on political expediency, as in the co-optation of the Muslim clergy during World War II to establish the "just" character of the war, followed by severe repression and atheistic propaganda from the mid-1950s.

[3]It is also significant that Gellner's Preface to *Soviet and Western Anthropology* (1980) is, in large part, devoted to terminological differences and the non-comparability of superficially similar terms. For a further elucidation of the term "ethnos" in the Soviet context, see also Dragadze (1980).

[4]Coordinated by the Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and carried out in Ukraine, Estonia, and Uzbekistan.

[5]I thank Bhavna Dave for calling my attention to this point, which is easy to overlook in view of the deteriorating socio-economic indicators for the region.

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